"Audi Alteram Partem."

SOME ASPECTS
OF THE
NATIVE QUESTION
IN
SOUTH AFRICA

A Reply to an Article by

Mr. CRONWRIGHT SCHREINER

IN

"The Manchester Guardian"

of October 30th, 1900,

BY

THEOPHILUS LYNDALL SCHREINER.

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PREFACE.

On October 30, 1900, a two-column article by Mr. Cronwright Schreiner, on "The Native Question in South Africa," appeared in the *Manchester Guardian.*

When it came under my notice a few weeks later, I felt that I should be failing in my duty to what I knew to be the true facts of the case if I did not reply, for the benefit of the readers of that paper, who had heard only one side of the question.

I drew up such a reply and sent it to the editor, with a special plea that he would, in the spirit of fairness and in the interests of truth, let his readers hear the other side and insert my article.

This request was not acceded to, and the article did not appear.

I therefore feel it a duty to send it forth in another form, in which it may, I trust, reach a greater number of readers than it would have done, if published in the *Manchester Guardian.*

This course seems especially advisable, because those persons, at present yclept pro-Boers, who seem to find their chief occupation and delight in unjustly vilifying their own Government and people, and as unjustly praising its enemies, have of late been actively trying to persuade the British people that the Boers or Dutch are the true friends of the natives, and that Dutch Republican rule is as good for them as British, if not better, while the "mining capitalists," and Mr. Rhodes

pre-eminently, are represented as being their deadliest enemies; than all of which nothing could be further from the truth.

The hope that the issue of the following pages may help to dispel some of these misleading theories is the reason for their publication.

While the ultimatum issued by the Republics was the immediate cause of the war still going on in South Africa, and while England does not claim that she is fighting for the sake of the natives, but for her own supremacy, which the Republics have endeavoured to overthrow, it is nevertheless true that her victory will mean great blessing to the natives and to the whole population. It is worth remembering in this connection that Sir Alfred Milner in his despatch to Her Majesty's Government of September 8, 1899, said:—"Of the matters which we cannot refer to arbitration, and cannot, in my view, without discredit or risk of a speedy revival of difficulties, abandon, I would specially refer to—(1) the position of British Indians; (2) the position of other coloured British subjects; and (3) our claim that all British subjects should be entitled to treatment at least equally favourable with that of the subjects of any other nation."

The extract from the *Times* of January 29, 1901, included in the following pages did not, of course, form part of the letter as originally sent to the *Manchester Guardian*, and one or two other paragraphs have been added to the original contents.

THEOPHILUS LYNDALL SCHREINER.

MAES MAWR, WHYTELEAFE, SURREY,
February 7, 1901.

THE NATIVE QUESTION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

To the Editor of "The Manchester Guardian."

Sir,—My attention has been drawn to an article by Mr. Cronwright Schreiner, which, under the above heading, appeared in your issue of October 30.

Will you kindly allow me, as the son of an old South African Missionary, and as one who from my childhood have been in touch with the natives of South Africa, and am recognized by them as one of their true friends, to reply to that article?

I am one with it in its estimate of the importance of the Native question, and in its general description of the Bantu people, and of the attitude towards them generally held by English as well as Dutch South Africans. I am one with the writer of the article in his, I believe, sincere desire that the future welfare of these people should not be subordinated to the interests of any other class of the population, be they mine-owners, farmers, or any other. I agree with him as to the desirability of the establishment, where possible, of large reserves in which natives may live under Imperial control, as they do in Basutuland. But I disapprove of his unfair attacks on the "Mining Capitalists," De Beers Compound System, the Glen Grey Act, and Mr. Rhodes, and of many of his statements, which are likely to prove misleading to those of his readers who

have no personal practical acquaintance with the matters whereof he writes.

He says, for instance, that the natives are at present on the side of the Africander party, that "it is the Dutch who are defending them, and protecting them from the oppression of the mining capitalists." In saying this, he does not give a hint to his readers of the thousands of civilized coloured people in the Cape Colony who, to a man, are on the Progressive or British side. But apart from these, what are the facts about the Bantus? The Basutus, the Bechuanas, the Zulus, Kaffirs, Swazis are not on the Dutch side. But a section of the Fingoes, led, or rather misled, by Mr. Tengo Jabavu, the editor of the *Imvo*, did, at the last General Election, support such candidates as Mr. Sauer, Mr. Merriman, Mr. Molteno, Mr. Solomon, who in their turn had accepted the support of the Bond, or Afrikander party. They trusted some of these candidates, who, it must be remembered, were to form part of the Bond Ministry; but they never trusted the Dutch Afrikander party, nor do they trust it now. That the bulk of the natives are on the Afrikander side is ridiculously incorrect, and I wonder at Mr. Cronwright Schreiner venturing such a statement. If any of the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* should go to South Africa, they need only stop any black or coloured person they may meet anywhere, and ask them whether they are on the Boer side or the English side, and why, and they will receive a complete refutation of the said statement. The idea of the Dutch defending and protecting the natives from the oppression of the "mining capitalist" is a rich figment of fancy worthy of Jules Verne. Mr. Tengo Jabavu's action referred to has done infinite harm to the cause of the natives, for it has been magnified out of its due proportion, and has tempted even those who have been the natives' best friends to doubt whether they are fit to be trusted with the franchise. As a set-off to the influence of this man and his paper, there is another talented Fingo, Mr. Soga, who edits a paper at East London, *Izwi Labantu*, which is thoroughly on the Progressive, or British side. The unholy alliance

between Tengu Jabavu and the natural enemies of his people is sure to come to an untimely end.

Mr. Cronwright Schreiner states that "legislation on the Native question has within recent years shown a strongly retrogressive tendency," but he forgets to say that this has been due to the ever-increasing influence and political tyranny of the Afrikander Bond. He then cites in proof the provisions of a Bill—the Strop Bill—(which I condemn as he does), and which he says "never became law." I should have thought that the fact of its not having been passed by the legislature pointed in the opposite direction from his contention, but he lugs this unpassed Bill in in order to state that Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr opposed it, although he knows perfectly that the Bill was one of the pet ideas of the Afrikander party and the Dutch farmers.

He next speaks about the raising of the franchise, but he does not say anything about Mr. Hofmeyr here, for the very good reason that Mr. Hofmeyer and the Bond were the prime movers in the matter. This raising of the franchise had to do with the house qualification. The purpose of the Afrikander party in securing this law was to disfranchise natives; but evil sometimes defeats its own purpose, and if the law encourages the natives to build better houses, it helps to lift them in the scale of civilization, and the education test works also in the same direction.

The Curfew Bill alluded to by Mr. Cronwright Schreiner is almost a necessity in some localities in South Africa, where large numbers of raw or uncivilized natives are to be found. Such are some of the English centres of population on the Eastern Province, whereas in the Dutch towns in the Midland and Western Provinces but few raw natives live, and the need of the law is not felt. This fact Mr. Cronwright Schreiner most unfairly presses iuto the service of his pro-Boer contention.

Mr. Cronwright Schreiner attacks the Compound System at Kimberley and De Beers. He says, "The natives are *incarcerated* for months at a time in corrugated iron *prisons*, covered over with wire netting,"

and "thousands of virile aboriginal men are herded together in a small space in a hot country, separated from their tribes, their women folk and families, and deprived of all freedom," &c. It would be difficult to crowd a greater number of gross mis-statements of facts into a few lines than Mr. Cronwright Schreiner has managed to do in the above. The account reads like some recital from the dark ages about dungeons deep and tortures terrible. And yet the simple truth is that, apart from the convicts whom the Government hire out to the company, these "incarcerated" men come of their own free will hundreds of miles to work in the De Beers Mines, and they are only too glad, when they are not at work in the mines or on the floors, to spend their time in the comfortable quarters provided for them in the Compounds, which are like small villages. Ridicule and laughter is all that Mr. Cronwright Schreiner's statements merit from those who know the facts of the case, but for the sake of those who do not know them, a refutation is necessary.

Let me say that I am no capitalist, nor do I hold a brief for any capitalist. I have no shares or interest in any diamond or gold mining company. But I know the diamond fields from their opening thirty years ago. For ten years I was a claimholder, and a large employer of labour there. Since 1880, I have been engaged in evangelistic and temperance work amongst black and white. I know the drunkenness, the loss of earnings, the loss of life, crime and disorder which prevailed among the native labourers at Kimberley before the Compound System was introduced. On Monday mornings the policemen would go about with stretchers to collect the drunken or dead bodies, the result of Saturday and Sunday drinking and consequent fighting. On one Monday, in a cold winter, they, if I remember rightly, picked up twelve dead bodies. To pick up two or three was thought nothing of. Thousands of God's dark-skinned creatures died at Kimberley for want of protection in those days. The Compound System became an absolute necessity, and the natives were delighted to be protected from drink and loss of money

in the compounds. There they are comfortably housed, have wide open spaces to walk about in, and teachers and ministers have an opportunity of labouring among them with some chance of success. They have schools, hospitals, churches, savings banks, &c. There is far greater cleanliness and much less sickness and death amongst the natives inside the compounds than among those outside. They can get all they need for their daily wants, and when their time of service is over, they go out with their money and spend it as they like.

Even the very convicts who are employed by De Beers Company are much more comfortable than they would be in the ordinary gaols, and have a chance of earning some money. The manager of the compounds states that "no native is detained in a compound against his will. If family affairs require his presence at home, his contract is broken, and he is allowed to leave. If he is tired of work, and becomes restles for a change, he is allowed to go." I am confident that no Christian who knows the facts will be found to condemn the Compound System, but will thank God for it. All the ministers and missionaries living at Kimberley do so, for the sake of the natives themselves.

The Rev. C. Meyer, Lutheran Minister, the Rev. Geo. Mitchell, Church of England Missionary, and the Rev. J. S. Morris, Wesleyan Missionary, men of the highest standing, have lately signed a report which characterizes the compounds as "a boon and a blessing."

I make bold to say that there is less sin, vice, and crime among the labourers in the compounds than would be found if they herded together in the open, and less than the average which might be expected where large bodies of men are gathered together. The labourers lead a healthy life of manual labour, hard, but not excessive, and this in itself is a preventive of vice and crime. They are preserved from drink and many other temptations, and their physical, moral, and spiritual well-being are the constant objects of the Company's care.

Of course the system results in benefit to the Company as well, for the labourers are sober instead of drunken as they used to be, and the theft of diamonds and their illicit disposal are largely prevented, as they ought to be; while it is a fact that these "mining capitalists" have raised the wages of black labour to three times its former amount. There is very much more which might be said in praise of the Compound System, but let this suffice.

It may be asked how it is possible that Mr. Cronwright Schreiner should hold the opinions he does in the face of these facts. One explanation is that he knows but little of mining matters personally and practically. When he came to reside in Kimberley only some six years ago, he had already commenced, for reasons best known to himself, that vendetta against Mr. Rhodes which he has carried on with such pertinacity ever since, and the effect of which is to warp and distort his judgment of anything and everything with which Mr. Rhodes' name is connected. Thus, on arrival at the Diamond Fields, he at once took up the cry against the Compound System, which has been chiefly raised by the liquor traffickers and illicit diamond dealers, who were and are the deadly enemies of the De Beers Company, because they no longer grow wealthy on the hard-earned wages or the peculations of the native labourers. Mr. Cronwright Schreiner's "forced service," "long hours," "low wages," "loss of freedom" are bugbears of his own imagination. In De Beers mines the men work in eight-hour shifts, and they need not work for more than one shift in the twenty-four hours. If they do so voluntarily they get proportionately more pay.

The following statement, which was not included in the letter as sent to the *Manchester Guardian*, is reproduced here for the further information of the readers of this pamphlet. It appeared in the *Times* of January 29, 1901, and is from the pen of a gentleman who spent a considerable time only a few months ago in personally examining into the condition of the labourers in the De Beers Consolidated Mines Com-

pany, for which every facility was granted him by the authorities. He says :—

I find, after a careful and independent investigation both within and without the compound, from interviews with the natives themselves, from personal examination of the compounds, from all the sources of information made available, and from overwhelming testimony of all Kimberley residents, both white and black, that :—

(1) It is not true that the natives are "whipped to work in the morning." There is a standing rule enforced with the utmost rigour that no white man shall, on any pretext, strike a native.

(2) The natives are not "confined and stockaded" within a guarded kraal. They are given free living rooms for their period of service, which they enter voluntarily ; they have light, water, and firewood free, and there is in no sense either "compulsion" or "imprisonment."

(3) It is untrue that "the wage under these contracts is 2s. for twelve hours' work." The pay for unskilled native labour varies from 3s. 4d. to 4s. 3d. for eight hours. Skilled and experienced workers earn a great deal more.

(4) It is not true that the "diamond companies" (*sic*) (there is only one great company, the De Beers, who own the Kimberley mines) "compel the natives to sign contracts under the Compound System." The natives are compelled to do nothing. They come to the mines looking for work, they come from all parts of Africa from the Congo to the Cape, preferring to come to Kimberley than go to the Rand, and they gladly accept the conditions of service, and renew them when expired.

(5) It is untrue that there is any compulsion to purchase from the company's "truck stores," and that natives "are always in debt." The stores are for the convenience of the natives themselves, where they can get food and necessaries of assured quality at the ordinary shop prices. I have above explained to what purposes the profits are devoted. [N.B.—They are devoted to the hospitals and other charitable institutions at Kimberley.]

The returns of the monthly sums taken out and sent out of the compounds by the natives answer the latter allegation as to their being "always in debt."

(6) I found no trace or evidence of "compulsion" in any department.

In conclusion, I will state my belief that the Kaffirs in the Kimberley diamond mines are infinitely happier and better off than the labourers in our crowded cities at home. Their pay comparatively speaking is twice as great, their wants are fewer, their responsibilities *nil;* they work as they please, play and laughter fills most of their lives, and no native who is at all sick or indisposed is asked to go into the mines. It is for their own great good that they are isolated from the temptations and evils which formerly victimized them in the town locations.

Next Mr. Cronwright Schreiner attacks the Glen Grey Act. I cannot agree with him as to its being a disfranchising Act, seeing that the people whom it concerns, by the fact that they were living on locations, were *ipso facto* already disfranchised by Mr. Hofmeyr's previous Act. I do not defend all the provisions of the Glen Grey Act. I think, for instance, that the holder of an allotment, in a district of the Colony which returns a member to Parliament, if he build a house on it worth £75 should be entitled to a Parliamentary vote. But, take it as a whole, the Act is an honest attempt to assist the semi-civilized population to a higher stage of civilization, in which they shall possess landed property by individual title, learn the art of self-government in local affairs, be protected from the drink curse, and be taught to realize the necessity and dignity of labour. These are objects which the best friends of the native approve of.

Mr. Cronwright Schreiner objects most strongly to the labour tax, and to the granting to natives of individual holdings of land which was formerly held in common.

Now, the principle underlying the labour tax of ten shillings per annum is that it is necessary to give a gentle stimulus to those able-bodied natives, who otherwise would do no work whatsoever from year's end to year's end, to seek labour for at least three months out of the twelve. If a native produces evidence that he has, during the previous twelve months, been in service outside of the district for three months, he is exempt from the payment of the tax; and if anyone satisfies the magistrate that he has been in such service, whether consecutive or not, for three years, he is exempt from the payment of the tax for life. The magistrate may also exempt those who may be unable to leave the location to seek work, or those who, with his permission, take service for three months within the district.

The problem on which the future welfare of the natives depends is how to make them industrious. The much maligned Mining Companies have done more to

help the natives in this direction than all other influences put together, for they have given such high wages, compared with what used to be given by farmers, that thousands of the natives have been attracted to the mines, and have proved themselves splendid labourers.

But there are a still greater number of able-bodied male natives who are too lazy to follow this good example. They live in absolute idleness. They are debarred by the Government from occupying themselves in making war on one another. There is no more game to pursue. The women folk of their families do all the hard work necessary to keep them. They are deteriorating themselves and their nation. At the same time the demand for labour on the part even of the mines is not fully met, while that on the part of the agriculturists is not met at all, for they cannot afford to pay the high wages paid by the mining companies.

There is a great demand for labour in South Africa, and there is a great supply of labour latent in the natives. The problem is to bring the supply within reach of the demand, and to see to it that this is done at a fair wage, and under fair conditions, both for employer and employed. The labour tax provisions of the Glen Grey Act are an attempt to help to solve this problem in the best interests of the black man as well as the white. I think it likely that the majority of those who go out to seek labour rather than pay the 10s. tax will seek it among the farming population, where the labour is naturally lighter than it is at the mines. It is worth mentioning that the Act declares that the proceeds of the labour tax are to be "devoted to the establishment and maintenance of schools for the education of the natives of the district in trades and agricultural labour."

Mr. Cronwright Schreiner next deprecates the provisions of the Act by which individual land tenure has been introduced among the natives in certain localities in place of the old communal system of holding land; and he ascribes the introduction of the principle to the

desire of the capitalist mine owners to oust the native from his lands and force him to become a serf. This imputation is not borne out by an examination of the provisions of the law.

Mr. Cronwright Schreiner holds Socialistic views, and it may be that his disparagement of individual land tenure is partly due to this fact. He would, I suppose, even in the old civilized countries of Europe, like to see individual land ownership abolished, and the land given to the people on the communal system. However this may be, the question is whether the holding of land and fixed property by individual title is a step higher in the scale of civilization than the communal system or not. If it is not, then all our boasted progress of European civilization is a huge mistake.

The principle underlying the individual allotment scheme of the Glen Grey Act seems to me to be this, to lift the better class of the semi-civilized natives up to that higher step. The provisions of the Act make it abundantly clear that its object is not to dispossess the native of his land, but to protect him in the retention of it. These provisions provide that the registered holder of these four-morgen or eight-acre allotments may not mortgage the said land or in any way pledge his interest therein, that the land shall not be alienated or transferred without the consent and approval of the Governor of the Cape Colony, that no canteen or shop for the sale of intoxicating liquors shall at any time be kept on the said land, that the said land and all immovable property on it shall not be allowed to be devised by will, but shall descend on death of the holder to his male heir, according to a carefully drawn up scheme, or in certain cases to his widow, daughter, or grand-daughters.

It must be remembered that the native population is increasing very rapidly, that suitable land for native settlements or reserves is becoming scarce, especially within the boundaries of the European states or colonies, and that it is absolutely impossible that the future of the natives can be provided for otherwise than

by the practical recognition of the fact, that a very large number of them, perhaps the majority, must take service and work for their living. Is it not wise and statesman like to realize this betimes, and to make provision whereby the natives may see the necessity, and be prepared for the state of things which will ere long certainly exist?

I agree with Mr. Cronwright Schreiner that tracts of country should be reserved for the natives in South Africa, as is the case in Basutoland, where they shall be justly, kindly, and yet firmly ruled under Imperial rather than Colonial authority, and in which they may continue to occupy the land on tribal tenure as long as that system continues to suffice to protect the interests and welfare of both natives and Europeans; but there are thousands of natives within the borders of the different European states and colonies who cannot thus be dealt with, and in whose case the principles of the Glen Grey Act might be applied with advantage, subject always to the condition that any native who raises himself in civilization, education, mode of living, and material wealth, to the level which the franchise demands from the white man, should be entitled to enjoy it also.

It does not seem possible for Mr. Cronwright Schreiner to write an article or speak on any aspect of the South African question without lugging in Mr. Rhodes as the arch-enemy of everything good, so here we read of "most, if not all, of these reprehensible measures being associated with the name of Mr. Rhodes." If the facts I have stated as to the Compound System and the Glen Grey Act be correct, then Mr. Rhodes deserves, not the reprehension, but the thanks of all who desire to see the natives of South Africa becoming industrious and civilized people, and protected as far as is possible from the evils of drink, slothfulness, and barbarism. Those who know Mr. Rhodes, as he is, know that there is a philanthropic purpose in all his schemes for making money, and that he values wealth, not for its own sake, or the sake of personal aggrandisement, but as the means whereby

he may carry out plans which, in his opinion, will bring the greatest good to the greatest number of human beings. He is too big-hearted, big-souled a man to wish to hurt any man or any class of men, and, realizing the humanity of the black man, he seeks to raise him in the scale of civilization. Let those who doubt this inquire from the people, white, black, or coloured, who are or have been in Mr. Rhodes' employ, whether it be in the mines, or in connection with his fruit farms, or with any other industries, and they will be more than satisfied that my statement is correct, and that if all capitalists and employers of labour were like Mr. Rhodes, the quarrel between capital and labour in the world would speedily cease to exist.

Allowing, as Mr. Rhodes himself has more than once done, that he made a great slip and committed a grievous fault in connection with the Jameson raid, is that one great mistake to blind us for ever to the magnificent services to South Africa, to England, to the British Empire, to the native tribes of the interior of Africa, to the world at large, which he has rendered, is rendering, and will still render, by devoting his life and wealth to the opening up of the Dark Continent to the influences of civilization, trade, commerce, and Christianity, under the British flag? Surely not! Yet that is what his enemies aim at effecting.

Mr. Rhodes has never defended himself against any of the calumnies heaped upon him for the last eight or nine years by men and women, many of whom have undoubtedly been actuated by feelings of disappointed ambition, political or financial; and, as far as I know, he has never asked anyone else to defend him, but has trusted to live down the calumnies; and this much is certain, that in time to come, when the very name of most of his calumniators shall have passed from the memory of mankind, his, despite the mistakes he has made, will be found "writ fair on History's page," as that of one of "God's great Englishmen," who lived to strengthen the Empire, and to benefit the world.

I close this article with the following extracts from a paper published by Mr. Cronwright Schreiner

seven years ag[illegible]
idea had run av[illegible]
first the great nati[illegible]
say that the policy of the Bon[illegible]
inhuman, and foolish. . . They (*i.e.*[illegible]
are the 'strength of the Bond') look upo[illegible]
more as a higher type of animal than as [illegible]
being, and their behaviour to him is regulated a[illegible]
ingly. If they had their way, he would be enti[illegible]
disfranchised and kept down in every conceivabl[illegible]
manner; he would never have fair play. . . They talk of forcing the natives to work, when it is he who is doing our work, while the poor whites, their own people, will not stir a finger. . . To humane, enlightened, unprejudiced men, the Bond policy must be most repugnant; it is a low type of mind which ignores the rights of the blacks, but to come to a lower platform, *I am sure the Bond policy would spoil our labour supply*, and gravely complicate the native problem. We must not allow it to gain any more power to legislate for evil." And as to Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr he says, "A great statesman is constructive, not destructive; and he who concentrates the power of ignorance, and makes it a means of preventing healthy and progressive legislation, can he be called great in any sense of the word?"

Trusting that what I have written may assist thinking men and women in coming to right conclusions on these all-important questions,

I am, yours truly,

THEOPHILUS LYNDALL SCHREINER.

MAES MAWR, WHYTELEAFE, SURREY.

December 6, 1900.